

# Functional Poverty

by  
Mildred Binns Young



Pendle Hill Pamphlet 6

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## Foreword

The three papers in this pamphlet derive vitality and validity from the unusual experiences of the author and from her spontaneous response to those experiences. Mildred Young, as well as her husband, Wilmer Young, was born into the Society of Friends. For a number of years they lived and taught at Westtown School. They have engaged in relief work in post-war Poland, in rehabilitation

projects in the mining regions of Kentucky, in both rural and urban experiments in Pennsylvania, and in the work of the Delta Cooperative Farm in the sharecropper region of the South. Even more significant has been their connection with the Work Camp program of the American Friends Service Committee. Each summer for the past five years and again this season they have been intimately associated with at least one camp. This experience, both with the young people involved and the communities touched, was decisive for the development of the thesis of this pamphlet.

Mildred Young spent the autumn term of 1938 at Pendle Hill. The papers here published were written and delivered during that time. "Toward a Functional Poverty" was prepared for the Women's Problems Group of the two Philadelphia Yearly Meetings of the Society of Friends. "Training in Relatedness" was given as a Friday evening lecture at Pendle Hill. "Capable of Peace, an analysis of the position of sharecropper and pacifist", was read before the Social and Industrial Section of the American Friends Service Committee. The form in which the three addresses were originally given has been substantially retained.

Elizabeth Biddle Yarnall

## **Toward A Functional Poverty**

Some people are content with the outward pattern of their lives; their material surroundings seem to them the soil in

which their personalities and special gifts can appropriately flower. They feel that their part in life is best fulfilled through arrangements of beauty, amenity, or comfort. Others feel limited and blocked, weighed down by the conditions of their outwardly fortunate lives, their strength and purpose frittered away in uncongenial activity and care, their souls dwarfed in a hostile and infertile soil. They long to set themselves free. What I have to say is intended for people in whom this longing has got past denying.

My thesis is that some of the means for freeing our lives lie in drastic limiting of material possessions and processes, in a discipline which paradoxically has its reward in extension of our facilities and of our strength and insight to use them to the full. But we cannot grasp these means for freeing our lives until the necessity is made plain in our own hearts and we want it completely.

When the necessity becomes plain, when the longing to set ourselves free is past denying, we begin to open into a realization of personal responsibility, of the oneness of human life, of what has been called *unlimited liability*. We feel the obligation and the privilege to live as if we each had many lives to live and could afford to hold loosely our little footholds in this one. This opening out is the great release. It leads to a next step which may be a clear recognition of our own job, our exact place in the scheme of work. We have the records of women who have so clearly known their job that they found the way to be free to do it. There was Elizabeth Fry, with her immense household in the 18th century style. There was Muriel

Lester, with her wealth and the responsibility toward parents which an unmarried woman often feels with especial poignancy. There was Margaret Sanger, with health problems and obligations to a family. It was not that these were more free than the rest of us: it was that they knew beyond denial what was their job. So they could find, because they had to, the freedom to do it.

For some of us the realization of unlimited liability may lead to a different next step. It cannot leave us stationary. Out of a sense that there is work to be done, liability to be met, responsibility to be shouldered, we may find the place to take hold through first laying down, in order that our hands may be free to take hold, much that is already crowded into them.

Now, frankly, most of us have our hands so full of baubles that we haven't even a finger free with which to reach out and satisfy the claim of *unlimited liability*. Poverty, or some approximation to it, willingly assumed, would set us free both for finding our responsibility and for fulfilling it when found. That is why I have called it *functional* poverty. It is to be embraced not as an ideal of beauty, our Lady Poverty of the Middle Ages, though it may wear her features. It is to be embraced not as a penance for the benefit we have long had from a society that starves our brothers, though it may be partly that. It is to be taken up not as a shirking of the responsibility of wealth or privilege, but as acceptance of wider responsibility. It is to be taken up as a way to freedom, and as a practical method for finding the time and strength to answer one's deepest need

to be serviceable for a new world. I cannot come near these brothers and sisters of my wider self, no matter how sincerely I may think I want to, if I am swaddled round in the trappings of wealth or privilege. I am like someone swelled out with a life preserver, unable to embrace my dearest friend.

This poverty is then a stripping off of encumbrances, a practical condition of preparation for work and the performance of it. We have heard of functional architecture. Every part of the building has some structural use. The building may be more beautiful and decorative than buildings ever were before, but it will have no part that does not carry its load, bear its share of the total function of the building. So with our lives. This poverty I speak of is to be functional to the life we feel called upon to lead in carrying unlimited liability.

But now to get to practices. A few will take the way we as a family took, of cutting right through our whole tradition of living standards and going into the midst of a group where living was dangerously poor, of amalgamating ourselves with that group in order to throw our weight in at the same point where they were applying their own in an effort to find a new level of wholesome, productive, rehabilitating life, a possible pattern for other communities. In such participation in community growth many problems of simplification solve themselves. The incipient capacity to realize human unity and unlimited common and mutual responsibility is a tender plant, needing favorable conditions in which to grow. It finds them in such intimate

association with need. Hardly anyone will set a lavish table if her own neighbor is cooking beans and corn bread, meal after meal. Hardly anyone will hang expensive drapery at her window if her own neighbors and their children are shivering under thin covers and crowding together into one bed for warmth as the winter grows keener.

There are some who cannot and should not break away to these conditions which are more favorable for automatically cutting free from much time-and-money-consuming paraphernalia. Even if they could break away, reason tells them that need is almost at their doorstep, that here, wherever they are, a new world needs building. Why should they run away? Besides in the soundest kinds of participating work with others, one is often most effective where he is native.

And so, it is to a double question that we address ourselves. Remaining where we are, how shall we clear our lives so that we can relate ourselves with our communities in concerted action for a new world? How shall we grow so urgently aware of the need for such action that we perforce find the way to clear our lives for it? The two answers will have to seesaw along together. A little gain in realization follows the first effort at freeing one's life, a greater effort in freeing one's life results from the gain in realization, and so on again and again. One must begin where one is.

People used to say that the way to disarm was to disarm, and it was thought very bright, but it was found not to be so

simple. Similarly the way to simplify is to simplify, but that isn't so simple either.

Fresh from a community where life is below the level of health and efficiency in its standards of living, I cannot help feeling it strange that some of the trappings of our life here do not fall off of themselves. Take meals. Three dishes will make as wholesome a meal as ten, and after a little inuring to the new custom they will be as satisfying. The saving in cooking and dishwashing adds up to hours in the week. Linen, except napkins, can be dispensed with, and no loss in beauty or amenity. Only the conventions are scrapped, and hours more in the month are saved.

Or take the stuff with which we decorate our homes. I come now from a house of three rooms and a shed. Five of us live in it with all the equipment we need for cleanliness, health, and joy. I have yet to see a home in my visits hereabouts that has as much cleared space on shelves and walls, as much unencumbered floor space per room, as we have. How is it done? Just by getting rid of unneeded objects, depending for beauty on order, proportion, and the light that floods in through the unmuffled windows. We have two or three intrinsically beautiful objects with no use except beauty, but for some time we had them in the attic and without them the room was already beautiful. In one room we cook, eat, study, sew, visit or read, and wash dishes. A dozen times a week I am struck with the fact that there is more absolute beauty in this room than we ever had in any of our nine previous houses. Here every operation of living is so simplified that even without any modern



machinery, except an iron and a vacuum cleaner, housework takes up less time per room than it ever did before. There is time for my garden and flowers, and still time for what I want to do above everything else except to care for my family properly, namely, to work in field and garden with the women of the Farm, and to join with them in the common work of the co-operatives, the women's club, and other community-building activities. There is also strength for it, though I often wish there were more of both time and strength.

Then think of clothes. But here the moral is too obvious to need elaboration. All of us must have felt the dragging shame that strikes the heart at the weary end of a shopping day which may have begun with a new dress for a special occasion, but has ended with shoes, hat, gloves, and maybe even a new coat. Some of us even go so far as to need ornaments to set off the new outfit, and possibly a new hair-do because the hat style is made for this year's shape in women's heads. When we come into the street with the burden of this orgy on our hearts, we see the old paper woman shivering in the same old coat she has had ever since she began selling on that corner. But by the time the new costume comes home, we have got rested and have succeeded in hardening the heart, and we can put it on and enjoy, literally, *ourselves*.

The early Quaker woman met this problem by the plain dress. It became a meaningless and time-consuming tradition, itself a sort of conforming to style. But in the beginning it must have been the concerned Friend's way of

meeting the problem of too much time, too much money, too much *soul* consumed on clothes when one's heart was full of the sense of mission. Perhaps now concerned Friends may feel that the way for each to meet the problems of dress is to find out what is essentially becoming to her, and wear it while it lasts, in spite of changes in fashion and without reference to the complicated conventions about occasions. So drastic a simplification of one's dress might mean some loss in beauty and attractiveness, which we value, but I think it need not necessarily mean that, and at some points the gains would offset the losses. One has only to note today's hats.

Now for simplifications on some other sides. Take committees. Committees are running people ragged. A few people carry the burden of meeting work in nearly all localities. Some of these few attend innumerable committees, giving a little hitch here to the forwarding of one work and a little hitch there to the forwarding of another. If these few must do all the meeting work and it is really true that no others are available, perhaps committees should be much smaller and composed only of those with whom the particular concern is paramount. Perhaps a strong steady effort on one or two committees would accomplish a bigger sum of work than a hasty hitch on half a dozen.

Take too the increasing demand that one be informed, well read, and up-to-date. Cannot we simplify here? Why is it not more dignified, more useful, more charming, and much

more satisfying, to be cleanly and clearly informed on a few subjects, with a firm judgment native to one's own intelligence, than to be muddled and talkative on every topic? Consider whether we need to read more than a fraction of the books, papers, and periodicals that we do read, whether we have any obligation to have seen even the best of today's plays and films, or to have heard even the finest of the orchestras. If the music, the book, or the play is truly recreative, if like Barclay's Quaker meeting, it truly makes me feel the good (that is, the true, the real) in me raised up, then it is my meat and drink. Otherwise it is frivolity, waste, or conformity to a convention of culture.

Now, some questions. Can these simplifications be carried very far without hurting one's friends? Will they divide us from our own without unifying us with the world at our gates? This is a hard question. Perhaps the only answer is that we should have first to become almost infinitely sensitive, and second that we need to help each other. A few who are in earnest will perhaps band together for common experiment and mutual support. They will set themselves simple goals at first, compare progress and findings, and move the goals further out as they are successively attained. They will need at the outset to be humble enough not to despise the easy stage that is the first lap of the journey. They will need to seek, in utmost sincerity, to grow so clear a spirit toward others that their own lives can be a challenge to their friends without implying the condemnation and the criticism that estranges and embitters. They will learn that not arguing but a clear demonstration of new freedom, range, happiness, and

effectiveness following upon the adoption of a way of simplicity or poverty will convince and console their friends who began with disapproving or ridiculing or regretting.

Second question: why should I simplify in order to save work in my household? I have, perhaps, and can afford, servants to do this work. The servants need the work. Yes, but one has heard that servants are hard to find even in these days of unemployment. One has also heard the query, "How can I put my maids on an eight-hour day when I myself am on a twenty-four hour day?" And one has seen also the effect on the personalities of people who submit to be waited upon needlessly by those to whom they return no service except payment in cash or maintenance. Waiting upon the persons of others, either because they are ill or in need or because we love them, is a dear privilege. But waiting upon well people for pay is a humiliation which it seems that only some old-time Negroes with truly simple and devoted hearts can rise above into an almost unexampled dignity. And perhaps this is a leftover from a slave relationship in which between sensitive owners and sensitive slaves there came to exist a mutual responsibility that expressed itself in real care on both sides, as is the case in family relationships. To be waited upon by one whom the service humiliates and to try to make return in cash hurts and dwarfs him who is waited upon, whether he knows it or not.

But to pursue further the question of servants: are we to turn off old and faithful retainers to become relief subjects,

in order that we may give ourselves the satisfaction of living in simplicity or poverty? I do not know how many of these old retainers that always get mentioned there are actually among us. Perhaps they would be just as happy for the remainder of their lives if they were pensioned off on a bit of land where they could grow flowers and vegetables if their fancy ran that way, or follow some hobby. We have long pensioned the aged servants of the state and have not been afraid that it would do them harm. Or, if there are young servants for whom we feel responsibility, perhaps they are longing for some education or training, by supplying which we could fulfill the obligation to them and set them on a new path of usefulness and self-realization. Problems of persons, whether of our servants or our other friends, are as individual as the individuals themselves and can be worked out only by approaching them in perfect candor and considerateness.

Third question: if I reduce my wants and try to live plainly, and maybe finally even in poverty, do I not add to unemployment? I think we must all know in our hearts that this is a specious argument. Do any of us really suppose that the economic dislocation of the era is to be set right by one class of people indulging themselves in order to give employment to others? However, we should at least issue here a note of warning. If circumstances are such that it seems right to continue to receive our accustomed income, and yet we feel that simplicity or poverty is the way to freedom and a new unity with our fellows, then the money saved by the discipline must not be kept. It must flow out at the same rate as if we spent it upon ourselves. Thus our

action will not add to unemployment in the whole. It may cut down the market for caviar, but it will increase the market for bread and cabbage. It may put some ladies' garment workers out of employment, but it will employ more of those who make overalls and children's underwear. Some hairdressers may go out of business, but the services of hospitals will be extended.

To what shall we give our saving? Many of us are afraid of philanthropy in the old sense. But we are surrounded by constructive enterprises of self-help needing assistance, by institutions devoted to building children fit to become the men and women of a new world and institutions devoted to repairing some of the wrecks of the old world, by struggling societies forwarding education or making urgently needed propaganda, and just now we are overwhelmed with the terrific need of new opportunities for literally millions of dispossessed refugees from several lands. Also some of us, as we free the money and the time for it, will find new work under our very hands that comes to seem uniquely our own and to which our money as well as our time may logically go.

Finally what about our children? Nothing that is second best is good enough for them or for any other children. I wonder though whether we shall not have to revise our measures of best and second best for our children. We want to give them a soil in which they will grow fit and fitted for a new world and for a period of hard transition leading out into that world. We want them healthy in body and mind, sensitive both toward others and toward themselves,

flexible in habits and staunch in principles, clear-spirited. We may well ask ourselves whether insulation in these ghettos of privilege which we have felt it our duty to provide for them is indeed the true training for a new world.

I have already spoken of our homes. As I look at our Friends' schools, I am struck with the increase in magnificence in the last dozen years. And as the setting grows more elegant the standard of dress, entertainment and all the rest goes up. Our children are beautiful and the Friends' schools are a kind of jewel cases in which their beauty is protected, or a kind of greenhouses where it is brought to flower.

We try to counteract the effect of this isolation in a padded cell of privilege by giving instruction and admonition about the problems of society. We try to teach the idea of human unity through the principle of "that of God in every man." We try to inculcate the ideal of responsibility and unlimited liability through the study of Quaker saints, like John Woolman. Meanwhile they "learn by doing" to be dependent for their very happiness upon surroundings which, even in our age of potential abundance, we can give them only by negating in our own activity that same principle of unlimited liability, only by striving to be ourselves and to make them the beneficiaries of a social system which can thrive only on victims. Yet the Friends' schools have something irreplaceable to offer, for which we have nowhere else to turn. Can we not create a body of sentiment against their increasing use of physical

magnificence, and as parents press for a truer setting in which our children and those of others may learn the sensitive, the poised, the free way of life which we believe the teaching of Jesus offers us and requires of us? The Friends' schools will be what we ask them to be. What is best and what is second best?

And now let us turn to our title, functional poverty, and see if we are ready with a definition of that strange-sounding term. I do not assert that poverty or the stripped life are in themselves prerequisites to power and strength, though saints and sages have claimed it and it may be true. I do say that, as long as our brother and our sister lie starved and beaten, our mere acceptance of ease, abundance, and safety, builds a wall between us and them so that we cannot collaborate in our common task, and builds a dam against the flowing sources of power and strength.

Functional poverty means an adjustment of the mechanics of living by clearing off the rubble. This is a clearing off that opens the way for new growth in wisdom, love, and function. It means a discipline that tempers the tools by which we work, and scours clean the glass of self through which we see at best but darkly.

## **Training In Relatedness**

Modern Friends are searching for some new alignment of their lives to accord, in the new circumstances, with their old convictions. Those convictions include the recognition of human unity, with the conclusion that no man may



achieve his real good at another man's expense, the belief that pacifism or non-violence is a whole view of life affecting not only our behavior as regards war and war preparation and war rumoring, but also our behavior as regards industry, business, education, work, meeting and family life, and the relation of the self to all others everywhere.

After the long quietistic period in the Society of Friends, the new responsibility took mainly the forms of education—really propaganda in a good sense—organization, and administration. Many committees were formed, some for spreading information and affecting attitudes, such as peace committees, race relations committees, and social order committees, some for administering funds through institutions, such as school and settlement boards. As Friends grew in financial and social status, they undertook more and more work of benevolence through these channels, a sort of increasing “white man's burden”, the *noblesse oblige* of the well-to-do religious person.

It is often said, and I think it is true, that Friends have accomplished ends and have had influence out of all proportion to their numbers. Nevertheless there is a growing sense that the means we have developed for implementing our principles are now inadequate, a realization that new means have to be found if the brotherhood of man through the practice of peace is still to be affirmed with convincing power.

At times we get from within an oppressive intimation that our peace work, our educational and inter-racial work, our testimonies for justice and equal opportunity, are all a sort of bubble floating on a very ordinary brew wherein are mixed, by way of our individual lives, the ingredients of self-interest, luxury, race and class insularity, violence through competition for or acceptance of conventional rewards in money and status, fear of the loss of these, and much else that is irrelevant and incongruous when set beside the great principles which we enunciate and want to exemplify.

It may be that some of our organizational and institutional work needs to give way soon to a kind of new relating of each of us to our environment, through more localized work and a more nearly total involvement of ourselves.

Some of us are not very closely connected with the communities where we live or those where we work. As middle-class people, believing in fresh air for the family, we spend much of our spare time getting from our work in town to our homes in the country. The city is not our community; we only work there. The country is not our community; we only live there. We know hardly any of our neighbors; our children go long distances out of the neighborhood in order to attend the nearest Friends' or other suitable private school; there isn't any community—just a lot of people living in the country and commuting to school, work, and committees. Committees in this modern unrelatedness are our salvation and at the same time our undoing. We try to remedy our isolated condition by

serving on many committees of which the members are gathered from all parts of the surrounding country or from all over the nation, to attack the problems that are threatening our life.

In the meantime, are we living as if we believed that all men are brothers? Are we living in the spirit that takes away the occasion of wars? Are we living as if peace were possible, present, potent, a living and dynamic *way*? Or have we substituted multitudinous “contacts”, the great word of our present decade, for community? Have most of us a “beloved community” which is an actual, day-to-day experience of mutuality, a warm entity, creative, if often uncomfortable?

It begins to be clear that although world-shaking events, good and bad, are precipitated by central authorities, by dictators like Hitler or spiritual leaders like Gandhi, they are prepared for by tiny experiences, growing attitudes far back in the smallest social and political units of the country. Literally, war is prepared when the people are not nourished on peace. This is why Gandhi has sent his non-violent workers out into every remote part of India, that when the time comes for new pressure toward freedom each smallest locality may have an indigenous movement toward non-violent self-rule, and that through long habit of working together in concerns of daily life the communities may be disciplined to harder tasks of self-suffering resistance and responsible initiative. Sound growth cannot be fostered by proclamations, edicts, encyclicals, or propaganda, not even by the centralized educational

institution, however enlightened. It must be fostered at the centers of growth by workers who are buried there, yes, but not lost there.

I was being shown lately a diagram of a tiny cross section of cortical tissue, and I saw how seemingly lost in the complex system are the points at which incoming sensory stimuli are transmuted to outgoing motor impulses. Perhaps those of us in whom concern for the good society has become the paramount, consciously accepted drive of our lives have not placed ourselves deep enough at the center of society to effect transmutation of our concern into action that takes place through the only instruments possible, human lives, massed human lives. Hertha Kraus said recently, "We have not found this powerful thought of love yet, out of which means would come for sound and reasonable action." Perhaps we have been trying to work out on the surface of the organism, forgetting that change takes place inside at the growing center.

In what we have been doing at the Delta Cooperative Farm, we chose the simplest sort of a beginning. We went to a place where a new community was being created upon a definite hypothesis or outline of idealism. It was comparatively easy there to relate ourselves organically to the community that was growing. Stark need made the basis of fellowship, and the striving to meet that need in a new pattern of non-competition or cooperation with one's fellows made the method through which fellowship was to express itself in community forms. No money-success nor personal distinction was to be expected for any member of

the cooperative, but rewards and success in the form of good life in a simple and friendly setting were expected.

Not everybody, however, can give himself such a short course in community living. Many must remain in and deal with a complex, artificial *pot pourri* of urban or suburban life in which it is almost impossible to see where any outlines of community exist. If society is to be re-integrated through the growth of character fostered in world community and through individual responsibility expressed in world community, then I think we pacifists who feel that we have entertained once that “powerful thought of love” will have to cut clean through whatever is merely conventional and sectional in our way of living and move over, often physically but not always so, into relatedness to whatever life is at hand that represents a growing point for community.

For some this might mean living in very poor localities and starting simple, neighborly buying organizations such as might grow into local consumers’ cooperatives to lighten the burden for those living near the edge of want, while freeing their patrons from continuing to support as consumers a system known to be exploitive and to have its inevitable issue in war. For others it might mean making their own home a center for recreation in a street or section where young people have no place to go for companionship, or children for play. If the relationship between neighbors is once made real in some such simple way, other means of developing community life and responsibility will open out before them.

Some person may feel that the permanently unemployed, so-called “unemployable”, group in an industrial neighborhood could be drawn together into gardening activity that would recall their self-respect by supplementing their living and even making them able to help their neighbors at times. As the new chemical gardening comes into more practical phases, this device might become feasible even in congested industrial neighborhoods.

Women living near together can almost always find common ground and work in which they can join to lighten their burdens, improve their homes, and educate themselves to better care of their families. Take a simple instance. Surprising numbers of the very poor have never learned to knit. If a little collaboration for the buying of yarn, needles, and instruction books is arranged, a large number of women can knit garments cheaply and with enjoyment. While doing so they may hatch farther-reaching ideas for collaboration.

These are simple beginnings. Almost all of them call for the persons who would be the stimuli of growth to live at the center where growth is expected, and to live as nearly as they can at the same economic level as their neighbors. The settlement house that sets an unattainable standard of beauty and material dignity is superseded.

By very plain living, which would be in itself one of the means of attaining close relationship with the

neighborhoods of their choice, some people would automatically set free sums of money which could be made available for financing simple enterprises that represent growth in community. But at the beginning probably the advent of the family or families who wanted to become neighborhood friends should not be marked by the arrival of money for a project. Let beginnings be simple and based on what anyone can give out of himself, and as the right project for community effort comes into view let there be a source from which modest help can be obtained.

Probably it is not best for families having incomes beyond their new needs to keep control of their own surplus. These surpluses could be pooled for a sort of foundation from which small well-considered community projects could borrow or receive help. If the individual keeps control of available money, the danger is that he will be carried away by the needs of his neighborhood and become a benefactor. He should probably place himself out of that danger and meet the needs, at first in any case, only as any neighbor would, by sharing what he has for his own use.

Of late there has come to the fore another kind of organization which should be increasingly a development in community. This is the labor union.

At its worst the union is a pressure group without responsibility. At its present best it is a community of workers, recognizing that the interests of sound industrial management are its own interests, striving to find out what is its true share in the responsibilities and rewards of

industry. Between these limits there are many degrees and beyond the best are unlimited possibilities. To wash our hands of unions in order to condemn what we deplore in their methods is only to deny ourselves the opportunity to assist and enlarge what is right in them. It is to refuse in a niggardly way to take upon ourselves any of the burden of adjustment to new conditions from which we all alike both suffer and benefit.

The labor movement in America, after a relatively long era, though in our great country no eras are very long, of slow growth, spurts of activity in limited fields, and periods of quiescence and conservation, has taken a sudden upward swing in this decade. The most aggressive and unruly infant unions are those now striving to get to their feet in big industries which were developing during the gold rush of the 1920's, for example the automobile and steel industries. Living standards had risen as the industries reached new peaks of production. Workers all over the country either gained the experience or caught the promise of more spacious living.

Then came the depression with its shut-downs and retrenchments, its dis-employment. The lately-rising worker was put back, pushed, and harried; but he was no longer quite defenseless. He had seen himself as a link in the intricate chain of prosperity and this vision had brought him to himself as never before. He could no longer be disinherited without protest.



There followed a widespread realization that industry as organized, even when its intentions were good, was unable to act responsibly toward the casualties of its own collapse, or even of its own development. Of necessity, government now stepped in with a whole new industry in the shape of national social services and civil works. And from the workers came a new drive toward protective organization in unions.

In large areas the basic demands, the guarantee of men's right to bargain collectively, followed by wages and hours legislation, have been accepted. Here and there, however, the struggle is still on.

What is the place of the pacifist in relation to this struggle? Our pacifism is based on respect for every human being, on the belief that violent repression begets only violence. We may possibly feel that the union as a pressure group is itself violently repressive of initiative in industry. We cannot, if we are honest, forget that industry has brought this on by its slowness to divide with labor the fruits of new discovery, invention and method. The worker is still the right hand of production and, whatever part may be played by machinery and technique, he is still first partner with ownership. He represents also the largest potential consumer of the goods and services which he helps to make. He does right to insist upon fulfilling his partnership. In insisting upon what he calls his "rights" he is insisting, whether he knows it or not, upon carrying out his full function. And workers' organizations grow in responsibility as they make this connection.

We who are pacifist, whether employers, ourselves workers, or professional people who are involved mainly as consumers, should be on constant guard not to let slip any opportunities to be of help in the sound working out of this struggle to adjust rewards and responsibilities. More than that, we need to put ourselves in such relation to workers' organization that opportunities for such help will logically come.

Sometimes the collecting and spreading of the facts in a given conflict are all that we can see to do. Some of this has occasionally been done already. Sometimes some of us may see means to bring together in an atmosphere of true seeking the opposing groups in a given conflict. When conflict brings distress we can sometimes help in relieving it. Some unions are weak and may seem to us so ill advised as to be almost vicious in their effect. We may be able to strengthen them at some weak point, as for instance by helping them to set forth accurate publicity, and thus at once resist unwisdom in method and enlarge the center of responsibility.

If, in these and countless other ways that will occur to us as we go on, we can make ourselves participants in the true development of this movement, we shall be in a position to help deepen and pacify the means used, which shall become at last the ends achieved, by workers' organizations.

Daydreaming about unions for a moment now, what shall we see as the ends to be achieved? The end, seen down a long vista of change, is secure world-community, peace on earth. But it is very far away and it is threatened by many dangers. What are some of the intermediate goals?

Education, certainly, and alliances for mutual help in times of stress, for security to members or to families who have met misfortune, for experiments in recreation and health maintenance, for cooperation in buying of necessary goods, such as fuel and food, or in obtaining services, such as medical care and housing. Already we see examples of unions that have become in a new but real sense communities. Some, beginning with education for specific union needs, have gone on to projects of further education for their members and members' families. At its best this is "education by doing" in the matters most relevant to carrying out community purposes. When a union gains strength and vision so that it faces forward to deeper binding of its group life, it has set visible milestones on the road to the realization of industrial community and world-community.

Several years ago a city union leader outlined a plan that was seething in his brain for developing a country summer community for his union. It sounded simple enough to be feasible. The families could enter into this communal experience for longer or shorter vacations, the wage earners commuting cheaply and collectively, the other members of families lightening the cost of the holiday by communal gardening and communal meals and by cooperative buying. He saw the women and children not only growing in health

and happiness, but growing also in a sense of partnership with each other and with their men in the effort of the union. He saw them being prepared to stand back of their men in time of suffering, to fortify them in collective intelligent initiative, instead of breaking them down into individual anxious husbands ready to give way to any pressure in order to relieve their families. He saw the summer experience of community carrying over into the more scattered life of the city and binding the members into closer and richer daily life, even when the union was under no stress. This was a shipbuilders' union, with some religious motivation, and its leader saw it growing strong enough through multiplication of group experiences to be able to make a peaceful protest against war.

It was a shining dream that he pictured to us, but he has never been able to carry it out. Perhaps if some of us in groups like our own Society of Friends had stood nearer to him, we could have helped him realize it.

More recently some young working leaders in another union have told of a plan for an educational station in the country, where young city workers could go from time to time for a few days of concentrated discussion, study, recreation, and experience of living together. It is perhaps only when worker groups have grown solidly together through such close relationships as these outside their jobs that we can expect disciplined, well-coordinated, non-violence from them in their times of resistance to whatever is felt to be injustice and violence, and intelligent partnership from them in their fulltime relationship to the

industry itself. And, lastly, it is only as this full partnership in industry emerges that we shall have the peaceful evolution from strife between interests to community of interest.

Will we help or will we stand back and watch and often deplore? I think we can answer in only one way if we are to keep up more than a tradition of pacifism in the new world that is here.

I have tried to speak of several sorts of participation in community building. All of them, and others which are not discussed here, call for one thing in greater or less degree, namely, the stripping away of the interest that centers in self and in the maintenance of our particular culture and standard of living. They involve the opening out of our lives to new possibilities of peace, new realization of personal liability, and new experiences of penitence.

It is well that authority is being challenged by change. Authority is vicious to anyone who long exercises it over the lives of others. Unless it is checked by an ever-renewed sense of stewardship it grows into arrogance, and this will happen even though the authority has been taken up as a sacred responsibility, under clear "concern", with devotion and idealism. There is authority in wealth itself, and I am almost sure that the practice of non-possession, completely or in some measure, is of sound help here.

Someone has said that it is necessary "to melt oneself down into the need of one's group so sincerely that one comes to

understand nothing about success except in terms of the upward attainment of that group.” Out of this unreserved participation develops the authority which I call “leadership from alongside.”

Does it sound like narrow partisanship? It is not that. For another important thing happens through commitment to serviceable work within one’s chosen group. A man may have allied himself with the chosen needy group in a spirit that was partly defiance and resentment. He may have been hurt and indignant at the callousness, exploitiveness, and self-interest of those whom it is hard not to hold responsible for starvation, degradation, war. But as he voluntarily labors to meet needs which are common to rich and poor, to serve, for instance, the basic simple causes of cleanliness and nourishment, there may come in him a new quickness of heart toward those others who are also maimed by our wry civilization, though not starved or uncared-for or dirty. Some of them are overfed, pandered to, and lapped in luxury that destroys them, and some of them are only closed up tightly inside the fear of letting slip what little they have secured for their families. He realizes now that the service is to them also. He is healed of the wound that his resentment made in him. Now his serviceability, even if it is exercised in a very restricted area or group, becomes universal and is no longer special and partisan. He knows now that it is only through taking on the whole burden of hope that he can avoid being crushed under the weight of catastrophe, present and threatening, which grows out of ill-will. Is this then an escape?

Yes. The demands of need are so many, the disasters to which our civilization has brought us are on such a scale, that we cannot again know joy and freedom except through complete shedding of personal ambition, through achieving in ourselves the inalienable security of freedom from fear of loss, through earmarking for our fellow-humanity not one per cent or a tithe, but the whole, of our resource.

We cannot do this except by slow, persistent, painful steps. But joy begins again when the work in us is begun. Was it this escape that Jesus meant when he said, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"?

## **Capable Of Peace**

### **An Analysis of the Position of Sharecropper and Pacifist**

A dilemma confronts many of us who are pacifists. We have at once a religious conviction against the use of violence, and a consciousness that the world is tending more and more toward the use of violence. The combination, if we let its implications work fully in us, would make us the prime radicals of our time.

Most of us feel increasingly that, whether war is actually in progress or being held at bay, we are in a society that is making war unavoidable at the same time that it is condemning millions of people to a life so poor and mean, so dangerous and frightening and hopeless, that even war can hardly add to their misery.

As pacifists we are dissatisfied with planning and training ourselves for the maintenance of our pacifism in time of war, a consideration almost amounting to that of private salvation. We are dissatisfied even with working to increase the numbers of those who will resist war service, dissatisfied certainly with expressing our pacifism in endless protests, propaganda, and conferences, and with raising money that the more effective speakers may go hither and yon and make speeches. All this is good and we believe that it has to be done unceasingly. But it is not enough.

There are many for whom pacifism has become a positive, creating force, the one way by which society may reach adulthood and remake itself in patterns by which men shall *learn* war no more. They learn it now from earliest infancy throughout life, in home environments, school, business, and social environments based all on violence, division, prejudice, self-seeking. Pacifism means that the whole self must be made effective for peace. It is a dedication as comprehensive and as binding as the old and beautiful marriage vow of the church—“With my body I thee adore. With all my worldly goods I thee endow.”

The endeavor to make non-violence a tool, a means, our whole armory of offense and defense, of change and of conservation, is a task from which we are allowed to keep nothing back. It is not a job to be worked at temporarily, during vacations, only while one is still young, or when one's country is at war, but with one's whole life. I often



think of the men who lost their chance to be a part of that first company of Jesus' disciples because they could not leave all in order to follow him. One said, "Suffer me first to bury my father." One turned away sadly because he had great possessions. And although I do not know that the New Testament tells us so, there must have been at least one other who turned away sadly because he had great intellectual capacities or pretensions, which he could not renounce in order to hear the simple things which Jesus had to say.

To serve the ideal of peace with one's whole life may mean going farther than anybody in our time has yet gone in any country. But we do have in our own time some great exemplars of the intention and the attempt, great enough to keep us moving ahead for a long way before we need be at a loss for a beacon. But any one example is relevant to each of us only for part of the way. Each of us is conditioned by his abilities and situation, each must find his own way. Not many have the scope of a Gandhi, and few will have the training of his long years before he came to leadership in India. Many must begin at once, young, inexperienced, with gifts large or small to make their pacifism a working force, to make it in the total sense what it has been so often called in a limited meaning, *a way of life, a way to life*. It is a way of life that can use fully, perhaps it is the only way of life that can use fully, diversely and greatly gifted personalities. But it can also use, and again use fully, every gift and talent however humble.

I remember in stories of those who went about with Francis of Assisi that there were some with executive talent, some who were musical, some with skills of carpentry or cooking, some with power to move men by speech, and some who were merely simple and devoted. Among these last are names that we still delight to honor. Recall too the story out of the Middle Ages about *Our Lady's Tumbler*. A poor clown joined a brotherhood; he suffered humiliation and anguish for a long while because he realized that first one and then another of the tasks by which the other monks performed adoration was beyond his powers. Then he hit upon an idea. At frequent intervals he went alone into the chapel and performed before the image of Our Lady all his best tumbles and tricks of acrobatics and legerdemain. So he became happy and was fulfilled until one day he was discovered and reprimanded for levity.

Today too we are wasting or reprimanding by neglect many special abilities and much capacity for devotion. For it is not only a question of being willing to make pacifism the whole force of our lives. It is also a question of finding the place, the method. Those who want it enough will find a method, but perhaps only after costly delay, and many will be lost by the way.

I think we older people are failing our young men and women in this. It is always on the young that the brunt of making pacifism effective, as of maintaining it, mainly falls. They come with a readiness for devotion that older people have forgotten. They are not yet hardened to the social and economic patterns and conventions that middle

age accepts. They are ready really to give *all* that they are, at the stage of life when personal security is most easily renounced, seeing that their generation is to be wasted unless they can find the way to make their loss the gain of coming generations. They ask only that they may be, in Murry's phrase, "used for the future." They ask for this bread and we give them a stone. We do not know what to say except to tell them to train themselves for this or that profession which is guessed to be of growing significance, or to take up some trade by which an honest living can sometimes be got. And when, with most astounding industry they have acquired the techniques, the skills, the professional training, we cannot tell them any more than we could before how they can use themselves to make peace prevail. When we say *peace* let us not interpret it as meaning only the absence of war or a nice balance between nations and economic groups by which everyone is kept quiet and sterile.

Many of us are interested now in pacifist "cells" or "seed" or "germ" groups, which meet regularly and practice techniques by which group solidarity can be achieved, and courage and other necessary qualities of the pacifist acquired. I can see why these are good. But I cannot see how, undertaken without a complete realignment of one's work, one's way of living, every factor of one's life, they can help adding to the unhealthy division within a person who must go daily to work which he knows either negates or at best leaves unimplemented his pacifism, or who maintains a standard of living which he knows, under the

present system and its breakdown, he could not have unless some were starved and neglected.

I am convinced that the pacifist cell or seed group which really deserves the name is not only capable of growing into, but does grow into, “new forms that may replenish the earth.” Such a cell or seed group finds out how to make itself a working unit in some larger community which itself is organic in society at large while remaining free enough to strive toward “growth into new forms.”

We can think of many possible examples of such larger communities. Any group which is economically basic in our national life and is at once almost totally submerged and stationary may serve for illustration. We have submerged groups which are not stationary, the unemployed in which the individuals are always changing, and the transient workers, sometimes made up of the same individuals for a long time, but not in the same place long. But the best example I can think of is the rural community in an area where poverty has gone almost to its limit, where conditions are ripe for change but the will to betterment is too nearly broken to exert itself and seize the moment. Such is the sharecropper belt, and there misery and apathy on the part of the workers over against frustration, financial break-up and fear on the part of the owners will bring a long trail of violence and disintegration from bad into worse. The status of the southern tenant farmer is practically hereditary and the constant moving is done in small orbits, up and down the same roads, on and off the same farms. These considerations make this, or any group

having similar characteristics, able to help us out of our dilemma in letting us help them out of theirs.

How could we begin to make effective our pacifism in that situation? I am taking it only as an example but it is an example we should be much concerned with. Even in Washington it is called the number one economic problem of the nation. It involves thirteen million people of two races.

Suppose we assume a simple community, backed by some security of land tenure and probably some guarantee of ability to secure occasional loans for operations or justifiable expansion. It will not necessarily be completely co-operative in its economic arrangements though probably it would be so to some extent. Subsistence agriculture is somewhat self-contained and somewhat isolated, though with endless possibilities for contact with neighboring different or similar communities. At the outset it will have of necessity, and I think not too unfortunately, a low standard of living and this should alter only very slowly. It may become a community where men, women and children have the good life that grows in an atmosphere of work, health, companionship and the sense of being secure in being functional, that is, essential and serviceable, to the whole life of community and nation. If it becomes this, it will do so through using and increasing all the resources of its soil, through education and recreation that thoroughly uses people's interest, energy and unrest, through intelligent neighborliness. Association for mutual help can take the place of expensive health services and the pitiful

systems of security, such as the inevitable burial insurance carried by even the poorest sharecropper families.

How could such a community grow to be a sound beginning toward a peaceful world, composed as it would be of people in whom physical power, native resourcefulness, and almost all the attributes of strong character are nearly gone? I believe that it could grow soundly, and even prepare to reproduce itself indefinitely, if it included a percentage of people who were committed with their total strength to the work of opening this way for peace by growing people who are capable of peace. I say “opening the way” intentionally, because peace is not something that has to be arranged or created. It is there as a creative force in itself, only needing channels. We block it this way and that by interests of self and family, race and class and nation, riddling with our boundaries mankind that can thrive only in united effort.

What would be the task of this cell or “seed” in the community we are assuming? The members would have first to grow peace inside themselves. No one of us would find himself fit and tempered, ready-made, for the demands that such work makes. We should have to grow to the task, not before undertaking it, but as we went along.

Second, they must succeed in making their own group life deeply peaceable. And this is no easy thing. They must find out how difference is made fruitful and not divisive. They must discover how the individual and the group lay hold of powers and resources that keep away stale weariness,

mental and physical. They must find out how rest and health are procured, how joy is maintained in the midst of the burden of the day, without the use of our middle class methods of vacations, "getting away for awhile," going to the movies, and the like. They must be ready to shoulder responsibility, as well as to shoulder the hoe and the spade, for this centering of one's effort in unspectacular participation with a community must not be made an escape from real responsibility. As nearly as they can they must earn their living by productive work in the community and as rapidly as they can they must learn to live upon what they can so earn. This means poverty, but not necessarily want or dangerous privation. It might mean these too, but the fear of them would decrease through the increasing right use of poverty.

They must learn how at once to draw strength from their inner and group life and to let that inner and group strength press them out into full participation with the community. It should not be a screen between them and an uncongenial environment. They must keep their group boundaries so fluid that if any of the community at large is drawn to their more intimate group life that life will always be open to him, and not passively open only, but actively reaching out toward all.

They must succeed in working out truly democratic processes in their group business and in the larger community business. They must beware of domination, and they must not be afraid to be unpopular.

This is a meager summary of a possible plan for pacifism in lifelong action. It means discipline, discipline through poverty, through work, through maximum responsibility for others and a minimum of authority over them, through participation in affairs often boring and discouraging, through the duty to be informed, alert, aware of whither the current is making in the world, in our community, in our group, in our self. It means seeing all as members of one body. Division is the way to destruction, violence and division are synonymous.

It means the full use of oneself, discipline supported and sweetened by devotion, devotion directed by discipline.

Granted that thousands of such pacifists will be required to make any noticeable impression upon even one sector of the confused economic and spiritual poverty that makes war, yet even a few can create a pattern. I suspect that many more than we suppose are nearly ready. Devotion in great quantity is loose in the world. The Nazis command it, so do the Communists. Will we pacifists know enough to ask for a devotion which keeps nothing back, the degree of pacifism that some gave in wartime when already it was too late to serve except in protest, the degree of dedication which recognizes that a man owes nothing to himself, no success in money or status, no achievement or self-expression, except to live as if he had many lives and could well spare one for total allocation to peace, to live as if he had only one life and dared not waste it on anything less than the future of man, who we are told is made in the image of God?



## **About the Author**

Mildred Binns Young was a birthright Quaker born in 1901 and raised in Ohio. She and her husband Wilmer J. Young established the Delta Cooperative Farm in 1936 in Rockdale, Mississippi, under the care of American Friends Service Committee. She has been the gadfly of Quakerdom ever since she wrote this first Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Functional Poverty*. Prodding the complacent to insight and action is her concern, and if Friends are her principal target it is because she writes from where she sits, in the midst of Quakerism both by right of birth and by conviction.

Nor has she been an armchair crusader. Years ago she and her family left the tranquil security of Westtown School, where Wilmer Young was Dean of Boys, to live and work with sharecroppers and tenant farmers in the South. There they remained for nineteen years.

## **Pendle Hill**

Located on 23 acres in Wallingford, Pennsylvania, Pendle Hill is a Quaker adult education, retreat, and conference center offering programs open to everyone. Pendle Hill's vision is to create peace with justice in the world by transforming lives. Since Pendle Hill opened in 1930, thousands of people have come from across the United States and throughout the world for Spirit-led learning, retreat, and community. Every year, people from many faiths and backgrounds come to experience Pendle Hill's

educational programs in arts and spirituality, community activism and leadership training, and spiritual deepening.

Programs are offered in a variety of formats—including weekend workshops, extended online/on-campus programs, and evening presentations. Information on all Pendle Hill programs is available at [www.pendlehill.org](http://www.pendlehill.org). Pendle Hill's mission of spiritual education is also furthered through conference services—hosting events for a variety of religious and educational nonprofit organizations, including many Quaker groups.

The Pendle Hill pamphlets have been an integral part of Pendle Hill's educational vision since 1934. Like early Christian and Quaker tracts, the pamphlets articulate perspectives which grow out of the personal experience, insights, and/or special knowledge of the authors, concerning spiritual life, faith, and witness.

A typical pamphlet has characteristics which make it a good vehicle for experimental thought. It is the right length to be read at a single sitting (about 9000 words). It is concerned with a topic of contemporary importance. Like words spoken in a Quaker meeting for worship, it embodies a concern, a sense of obligation to express caring or to act in response to a harmful situation.

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